

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

SYLVIA CZAYO

Interviewed by: George Payne

Interview date: September 1999

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Q: This is George Payne, retired Foreign Service Officer and currently President of Foreign Service Retirees in Tucson, Arizona. At the home of Mrs. Sylvia Czayo who will further identify herself.

CZAYO: I am Sylvia Czayo, widow of George M. Czayo, who was a career Foreign Service officer. Our first assignment was Seoul, Korea.

Q: Tell us a little bit about when that was, how you arrived there and a little more about the story of your time in the Foreign Service with you husband.

CZAYO: We arrived in Seoul, Korea, January 1955 and served until 1957. George was the Administrative officer there.

My story begins when I was working for the War Production Board. Mr. William Steinaker was in charge of the section where I worked.

Q: Where was this?

CZAYO: In Washington, DC. There were temporary buildings on the Mall; between the Capitol and the Washington Monument.

Q: Those were only temporary buildings, right?

CZAYO: Yes, they were temporary buildings. I worked in an office with several other women. It appeared they were very envious of my ability to perform in any area of that department. One day I became so frustrated and suddenly realized it would be impossible to please my Supervisor, no matter how excellent my work performance. With that realization, I jumped to my feet and went storming into Mr. Steinaker's office. He was having a very important meeting with two men. (These two men would come into my life again in Korea)

I do not know who these two men were, only guessing they were \$1 a year men. One thing I do know now, they were very important men and having a serious discussion with Mr. Steinaker. During this time it was not possible to receive a transfer to another position. I pleaded with Mr. Steinaker to release me to another area. He said, "get your coat and I will come and take you to another office when finished with this meeting". True to his word he came and escorted me to another section where I was warmly received and placed into a new position. The supervisor there was Mr. Stanley Werking in charge of important documents to be received once a week by the President of United States.

After only two weeks, I was the sole person left in the office to type the document for the President of the United States. (The other two women in the office were on vacation expecting to be back for this work.) The copy started arriving on my desk at 9 AM. Having had previous experience in preparing manuscript for books I was experienced in getting the copy in proper order. This office had not known of preparing the typed sheets in two galleys at a time, and thus having a finished page without any further handling of the manuscript. (They had worked into the early morning pasting copy into proper pages.) And so from 9AM to 2 PM that morning I had finished a report ready for reproduction without any errors 16 pages had been completed.

As my fingers were flying over the keyboard, I detected people were watching me. But I did not stop I just kept the typing going until finished. Mr. Werking was pacing back and forth as two people had been working on this report in the past and overtime into early morning. I told him to go away and just let me work. He did and was elated when at 2 PM the copy was completed and perfect. Then later that afternoon one of the women arrived, set to work overtime on the report. Mr. Werking told her to go home as the report was finished and at the printing office. She could not believe it and from that day on the copy was finished in early afternoon and no overtime. It set a record at that time. (I was typing on the varitype machine).

Later William Steinaker was transferred to the U.S. Department of State. He requested my transfer to his department, as he knew of my excellent work performance. (He was one of the men that had come to watch me typing that War Progress Report.)

I was put in charge of the Forms Department of the U.S. Department of State. Setting up both the Department of State and Foreign Service Forms. As supervisor I was responsible for all forms of the department.

It was at this time that I met George M. Czayo. He was responsible for preparing the regulations of the Foreign Service. My appointment was to prepare the copy for publication. Sometime after that we were married.

Assignment Korea 1955

Ambassador Strom's wife, Camella, met us in Japan to escort us to Korea. As we were flying over the Sea of Japan, Camella turned to me and said "Sylvia Radisch". I turned to her and asked how do you know me? She replied "You used to sing solos in my church in Washington, DC. You have such a beautiful voice and every word you sang could be understood I loved to hear you sing. (Later she had me sing in Korea for Cardinal Spellman.)

At this time there were only about five wives allowed in Korea. At this time Ambassador and Alice Dowling were assigned to Korea. One night I had a dream that the communists were invading South Korea again to bomb us. I told George the next morning but he paid no attention to me, or my dream.

The next morning I was invited to coffee at Ambassador Dowling's residence. (House number 1 compound number 1. I lived in house number 2)

During the course of conversation with the ladies, I told them of my dream. I thought the communists were going to bomb Seoul again. Three nights later about midnight there was a deafening ba-room and our little house just shook. I jumped out of bed and shouted to George I told you they were going to bomb us again. Of course he immediately got on the phone to our security officer. The officer could not be reached. (Later we found out he was heading to Kimpo Airport to flee the country.) Then George called more of our Embassy officers and each one in turn said their wives were hysterical, as Sylvia had told them of her dream. The men could not leave as they were trying to control their wives. In the meantime I was shouting I told you they were coming to bomb us again.

George and Ambassador Dowling went immediately to the Embassy to get control of the situation and find out what was happening. Then Mrs. Alice Dowling called me and asked if I would like to have a helicopter to evacuate me. I asked if she was leaving. Upon hearing that she was staying I said I would stay with her and if we had to leave I would leave with her.

Later that day we learned the communists had gained access to our ammunition supply and blown it up. The entire city of Seoul and surrounding areas were shaken badly.

Q: Was that the U.S. Military Dump, or the Korean Dump?

CZAYO: As far as I remember it was our U.S. Military Supply.

The next day Ambassador Dowling called me to the embassy. He told me please Sylvia, never tell the women any more of my dreams but to come to him and tell him directly. It was a very serious situation.

Thirty Tons of Tungsten

Back in Washington, DC, I was a member of the Mineral Society and very interested in minerals. In Korea I was especially interested in learning about the minerals of Korea. Back in DC. I had already started faceting gemstones and was excited about what Korea had in that area.

My thinking was the best way to get started was to get a group oembassy and military personnel to join with me to look for minerals.

So I called on the Minister of Mining to obtain permission to hunt and collect minerals in Korea. A few days later Ambassador Dowling called George to his office and asked why was Sylvia offered 30 tons of tungsten? Next I was called in to explain what happened. I told Ambassador Dowling I wanted to study the geology of Korea and had started a group from the embassy and with some military men, who also were interested in minerals, to study together. After a good healthy laugh and complete understanding what was involved, a Korean Mining Engineer was assigned to go with us on field trips.

As we visited mining areas and collected specimens, I sent them to my friend, Jewell Glass from U.S. Geological Survey, for identification. Jewell always was very excited about receiving the specimens and as mineral analyst, sent back a complete analysis. And so our little Korean-American Rockhound Club was established. An American serviceman taught us geology and we always were interested in what new mineral we had discovered. And as we learned so did the Korean official also learn about better methods of mining. (He was promoted after a year or so as his reports were also much more improved to the Korean Government.)

Talc

Martin E. McDonough, resident vice president of McGraw Hydro Carbon (Fertilizer plant) Chunju, Korea, had access to the talc mine in Chunju, Korea and brought 200 pounds of talc leaving it on the living room floor (this was about two hours away from a cocktail party we were giving).

When our assignment was about completed, I called on the first Minister of Mining and presented him with a formal list of minerals we had discovered. I also told him Jewell Glass of U.S. Geological Survey had formally identified them. Previously many of these minerals were not known to exist in Korea.

And for club members I had a tie bar made up for the men in our club and a pin for the women. It reads "Korean-American Rockhound Club 1956") KA means dog in Korean. About this time a secretary came to George and cried saying she was homesick and could not get a date. (We had a USO there and she could have gone and at least talked with some servicemen. Also we had the mineral club going.) Then I said to George if she will not join either of these groups send her home she will not get a date back home, and will probably die an old maid.

Orphans

Madame Yankelevitch, wife of French Minister Yankelevitch, invited me to accompany her on a visit to a Korean orphanage. The temperature was well below zero. The visit was a complete surprise to the people running the orphanage. Young children about 2, 3 and 4 years old were standing around naked and blue with cold. We demanded they be fed and clothes put on them.

We returned to the U.S. Embassy and told George what we had just seen. Immediately a call was put through to the proper authorities in an attempt to learn what happened to the many carloads of clothes that had been sent to them by U.S. citizens. That was solved in short order and after that someone went there to see that the little children were clothed and fed. Many problems had to be dealt with in the Embassy.

Senator Ellender Visits Korea

When he visited Korea he called them "Blood Suckers". Hearing this the Korean people started to storm Compound 1. They thought he was still staying in the compound. It was at this point Mrs. Alice Dowling phoned me and asked if I wanted a helicopter to fly me out. Again I said, "no if you are staying I am staying". Then George somehow got through and took me to our big gate to talk with the people. They were really angry. And demanded Senator Ellender. George talked with them (I was at his side) and told them he was not in the compound. And indeed he was not as he was being flown home at this point and probably over the Sea of Japan. I really felt such love for those people and knowing some of what they had been through my heart went out to them. After George talked with them slowly they disbanded and another crisis over.

Mites from Rats

One day I went to our Embassy nurse, Olga Bayer, for my annual shot. She said I cannot give you a shot as you have marks on your body that indicate bites. Sending me to the Army Doctor. After looking at my body he said, "You have been bitten by something. Please look at everything you are doing. Come back if you can find out what".

The next morning as I was cleaning my teeth I looked at the glass of water and the entire rim was walking in a black circle. (We had a boiler room next to my bathroom and a radiator had a board over it. I placed my clean clothes on top to warm them and my water glass to clean my teeth.) Well I was in shock and got a piece of scotch tape and captured some of the insects. After putting on clean clothes I went to the Army doctor and showed him. Oh my, you have been bitten by mites from rats. A real danger of bubonic plague. Everyone was in shock over that but for me a shot took care of it and I had no further problems.

Meeting the two men again from the beginning part of my story.

At an important dinner there were two men assigned on either side of me. I turned to them and said, "I know you. Remember that meeting with Mr. Steinaker? You were meeting with him and I stormed in the office?" It was at this point they acknowledged me and told the rest of the story.

What had happened those many years before? "Yes, we remember you." They explained to the others at the dinner how, as a young woman I had stormed into the office very angry, and they were having an important meeting. The Ambassador told me if I ever recognized anyone again do it privately but do not acknowledge before others. To this day I do not know who these men were only they were VIP's.

Q: You mentioned Senator Ellender and John Foster Dulles, were there other dignitaries visiting during the time you were there?

CZAYO: Yes there were many including Nelson Rockefeller. George and I took him to the DMZ. That was my first visit there. Mr. Rockefeller asked the Army officer in charge how did they get along with the North Koreans? They said they got along just fine. They just did not speak at the table. Later I turned to Mr. Rockefeller and said there would be less divorces if couples would practice that. On the way back to Seoul Mr. Rockefeller told me that his wife had lost her engagement ring on Diamond Mountain in North Korea. I said I have no plans to go hunting there.

Q: When did you leave Korea?

CZAYO: 1957. The shock of coming back to the United States hit me hard. As we were driving back to the east coast, I started crying. George said I wish you would stop crying what is it all about? Between sobs I said, "Our country is going downhill. Streets are dirty and the people were no longer caring about the way they looked. The Korean women always tried to look so pretty and I had seen the little houses they came out of and so I cried almost across the United States for my beautiful country.

Unexploded Shells

We were having a dinner party at house number 2 compound number I. There were Army officers there. Another radiator with a board on top had some bullets I had pick up in the compound. One of turned to me and asked where did these come from? I said as I was walking my little dog (Teddy Bear) I picked them up along the wall of the compound. He took them up very carefully and out the door and put them into his jeep. He came back and said to me please do not pick up those shells they are live. Call us and we will come and get them.

Q: Since you left, have you been back to Korea?

CZAYO: No I have not. I understand the house number 2 that I lived in had been torn down. It was a beautiful house over 500 years old at that time. Q: From there where did you go? He came home on leave and after that the next assignment was Hong Kong.

CZAYO: In closing I would like to add there were other incidents to report but these are the most important. I would like to extend my appreciation to our fine Foreign Service Officers. Very dedicated men to our country, and to their wives also. It is my desire that I have contributed something useful to my country and to you for taking time to read my story. May God Bless America

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: George Mark Czayo

Spouse's Position: Management Analyst; Executive Director of Inter-American Affairs; Administrative Officer (Seoul, Korea); American Consul General (Hong Kong); Inspector; Executive Director of International Organization Affairs

Spouse Entered Service: 1945Left Service: 196You Entered Service: 1943Left Service: 1955

Status: Widow

Posts in chronological order: 1945-1955Washington, DC1955-1958Seoul, Korea1959-1963Washington, DC1963-1965Hong Kong

Place/Date of birth: Brentwood, Maryland; November 19, 1919

Maiden Name: Sylvia Edith Radisch

Parents:

Herman Radisch (Born in Fortress Monroe, Virginia. My grandfather Radisch escaped Germany in an oxcart of hay. Soldiers' pitchfork missed him. Came to U.S. and joined the U.S. Army. Was a "bootmaker" for U.S. government.)

Evelyn Carolyn Bless Radisch

Schools (Prep, University): Attended summer classes at University of Maryland

Profession: Forms analyst, U.S. Department of State in charge overtime unit and forms program.

Date/Place of Marriage: April 9, 1947; Holy Trinity, Georgetown, Washington, DC

Children: None

Volunteer and Paid Positions held: In charge of forms unit in the U.S. Department of State - had 4-6 people working under me.

Honors and Awards: Many honors from top executives of U.S. Department of State due to excellence in work and working with foreign service officers.

I prepared and supervised the publishing of "Secretary's Handbook" of the U.S. Department of State.

I worked in the "old" U.S. Department of State next to the White House and also the new building. I set up the "forms" program in the U.S. Department of State for Foreign Service and Department of State.

End of interview